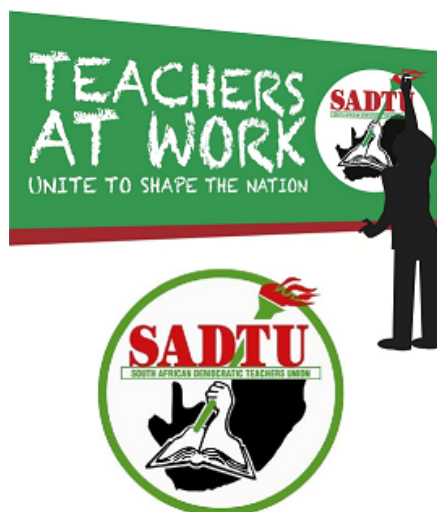




The black, green and gold “national flag” of the liberation struggle

## **June 26<sup>th</sup>: South Africa Freedom Day**

- Stayaway -**
- Defiance Campaign -**
- Congress of the People -**
- Anti-Apartheid Movement -**



## Part 1

# June 26<sup>th</sup>: South Africa Freedom Day

During the struggle against apartheid, South Africa's national liberation movement – the African National Congress – observed special days. The ANC's National Freedom Day was the most important day in the calendar. This day was June 26<sup>th</sup>.

The special days of the ANC, marked every year with events and ceremonies, were:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Occasion</u>
8 January	ANC Anniversary	1912	Founding of the ANC
21 March	Sharpeville Day	1960	Sharpeville Massacre
1 May	May Day	1886	International Workers' Day
25 May	Africa Day	1963	Founding of the OAU
16 June	Soweto Day	1976	Youth Uprising
26 June	South Africa Freedom Day	1950	National Stayaway*
9 August	National Women's Day	1956	FEDSAW March to Pretoria
16 December	Umkhonto we Sizwe Day	1961	Founding of MK

Five of these days are now Public Holidays in South Africa. The exceptions are January 8<sup>th</sup>, May 25<sup>th</sup>, and the most important day of all: National Freedom Day, June 26<sup>th</sup>.

April 27<sup>th</sup> – the anniversary of the first universal-franchise election – is now called Freedom Day in South Africa.

\* 26 June celebrated, and was the occasion of, the following

**June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1950**: the second national stay-away, preceded by:

Defend Free Speech Convention, Johannesburg, 26 March 1950

**1 May 1950, the first stayaway and massacre (18 killed)**

Publication of Unlawful Organisations Bill (later Suppression of Communism Bill);

CPSA disbanded on 20 June 1950

**June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1952**: the Defiance Campaign

Preceded by Joint Planning Council between ANC and SAIC

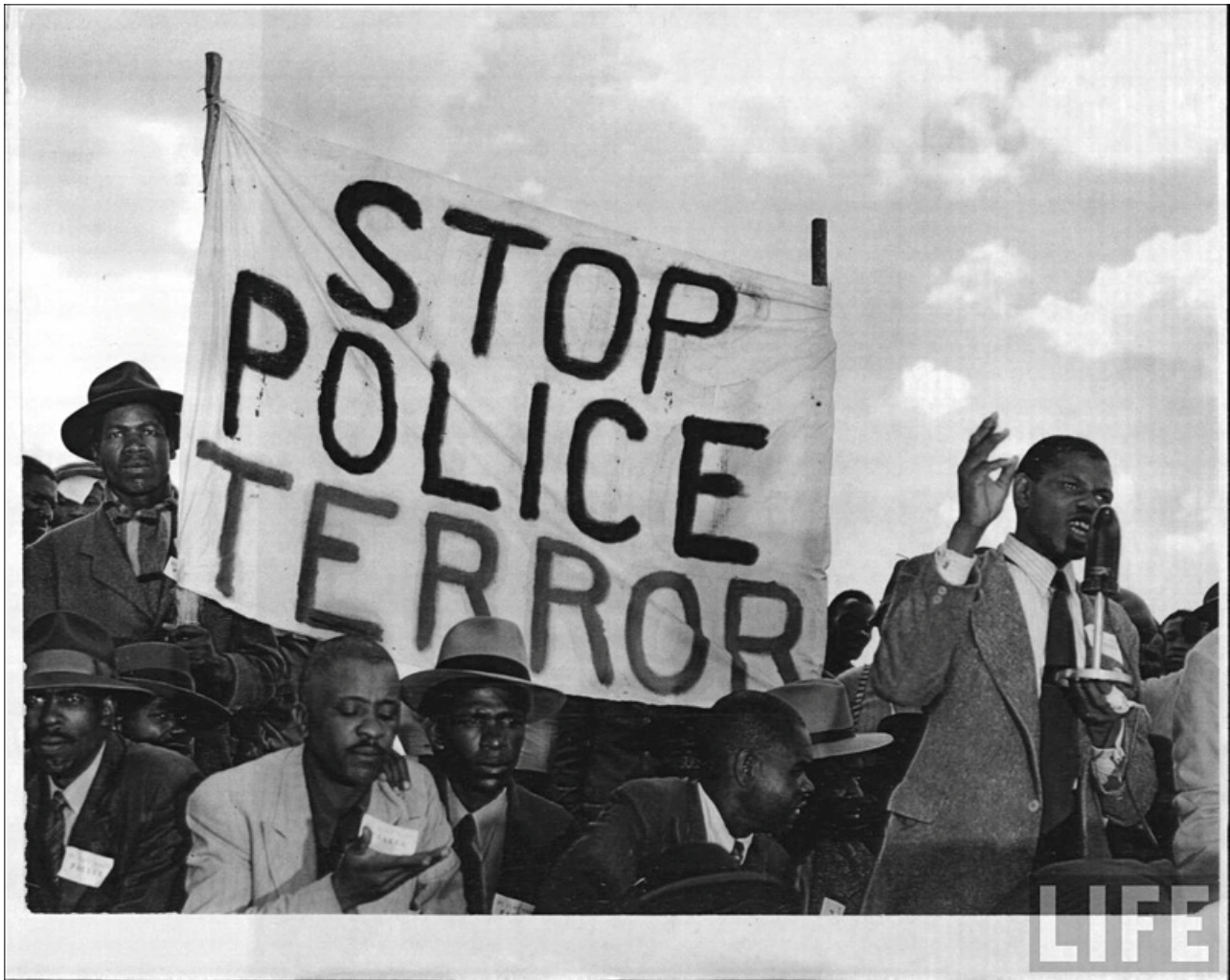
**June 26<sup>th</sup> 1955**: Freedom Charter signed

Preceded by Congress of the People Campaign (Freedom Volunteers)

**June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1959**: Anti-Apartheid Movement formed

Preceded by boycott campaigns in South Africa

The above will form the content of the next four parts, followed by a **Summary**.



"Communist meeting, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1950."

[Margaret Bourke-White, Life Magazine](#)

## June 26<sup>th</sup> 1950:

### The Stayaway

June 26<sup>th</sup> 1950 sums up a whole period, that began in 1946, when:

*"on August 12, 1946, the African mine workers of the Witwatersrand came out on strike in support of a demand for higher wages - 10 shillings a day. They continued the strike for a week in the face of the most savage police terror, in which officially 1,248 workers were wounded and a very large number - officially only 9 - were killed."* (M P Naicker, ANC Director of Publicity, 1976).

Naicker concluded:

*“The brave miners of 1946 gave birth to the ANC Youth League's Programme of Action adopted in 1949; they were the forerunners of the freedom strikers of May 1, 1950, against the Suppression of Communism Act, and the tens of thousands who joined the 26 June nation-wide protest strike that followed the killing of sixteen people during the May Day strike. They gave the impetus for the 1952 Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws when thousands of African, Indian and Coloured people went to jail.”*

The following year, on March 9, 1947, Drs Dadoo, Xuma and G M (Monty) Naicker, signed the Joint Declaration of Cooperation, that has ever since been known as “The Doctors’ Pact”, between the ANC and the two Indian congresses (Natal and Transvaal). This was another precursor of the 1950 stayaway, but more especially of the 1952 Defiance Campaign, and then of the Congress of all kinds of South African people in support of the Freedom Charter adopted on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1955.

In June, 1948 the National Party came to power in South Africa, following a General Election among the white minority rulers of the country.

In March, 1950 a 'Defend Free Speech' Convention was called in Johannesburg by the ANC (Transvaal) the Transvaal Indian Congress, the African People's Organisation and the Johannesburg District of the Communist Party. Under the chairmanship of ANC President Dr. Moroka the conference adopted a militant series of demands for freedom of speech, movement and organisation, for land and the ending of colour bars. It issued a call for a one-day general strike and stayaway on the first of May, 1950.

*“The strike was an outstanding success”* wrote Michael Harmel, author of “Fifty Fighting Years”.

However, in the evening of the day the police went on the rampage. They killed 18 people on the East Rand and in Alexandra Township. In response, the ANC called an emergency conference in Johannesburg. Attended by representatives of the executives of the South African Indian Congress, the APO and the Communist Party, the conference heard an analysis of the Suppression of Communism Bill, published just after the May 1 stayaway.

The conference resolved on mass action, in protest against the law to suppress the Communist Party and other undemocratic measures. 26 June 1950 was set aside as a day of mourning for those killed by the police on 1 May, a day of nationwide strikes and protests. A joint committee was established to implement the decision.

*“The campaign that followed, and the massive response from all parts of the country, marked a milestone in the development of the unity in action of the national liberation movements of the oppressed peoples, together with the revolutionary working class movement, **the 'Congress Alliance'**.” (Michael Harmel, Fifty Fighting years).*

O R Tambo later wrote:

*“On June 26, 1950, South Africa came to a standstill as hundreds of thousands of workers and people demonstrated their determination to meet the violence of the oppressors with militant struggle for liberation... We demanded as we still demand ‘tokologo ka nako ya rona,’ for our people have set themselves the goal of complete freedom.”*

In 1953, Chief Luthuli wrote:

*“Ever since 1950, June 26 has become a special day in the calendar of the African people of South Africa. Unlike the other days, which are usually singled out for special marking in the South African calendars, this day has not been fixed as a statutory holiday by the white Parliament of the country.”*

The second stayaway strike – June 26<sup>th</sup> 1950 – had been a success.

But notably, this was a day that was not received from others, but one that was wholly nominated by the people’s movement in the time of its great gathering-together as a united force, in defiance of the race laws of the day, and as a Congress Alliance. It was deliberate.

Umrabulo, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2003, summed it up like this:

*“These were the first steps in the implementation of the Programme of Action which converted the ANC into an effective mass political organisation enjoying the loyalty and support of millions of people throughout the country. The 26 June Day of Protest laid the foundations for the joint action of the Congresses which ultimately consolidated itself in the 'Congress Alliance' whose initiatives dominated the political scene in the 1950s.”*

# UMRABULO



**Mandela and Pass Book, photo by Eli Weinberg**

## **June 26<sup>th</sup> 1952:**

### **The Defiance Campaign**

Umrabulo, 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2003, continued:

The next phase of the struggle culminated in the 1952 'Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws'.

Walter Sisulu, Dr Moroka, J B Marks, Dr Dadoo and Yusuf Cachalia were appointed members of a Joint Planning Council after a meeting of the executives of the ANC, SAIC and APO with observers from the Franchise Action Council. The report of the Planning Council was endorsed by the ANC's annual conference in December 1951, and in January 1952 President-General Dr Moroka and Secretary-General Walter Sisulu wrote to Prime Minister Malan calling for the repeal of six 'unjust laws' by 29 February.

The six unjust laws were the Pass Laws, Stock Limitation, the Group Areas Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, the Coloured Voters Act and the Bantu Authorities Act - keystones of the apartheid state being set up by the Nationalist government.



Govan Mbeki wrote:

*“The Defiance Campaign was a significant watershed, which saw 8,326 people volunteering to defy unjust laws and thus court imprisonment. The liberation struggle derived several benefits from the Defiance Campaign. Firstly, it gave an opportunity to the rank and file of the ANC membership to be involved in a practical way in the struggle against oppression. The Campaign unleashed the pent-up energy of the people and inspired them with a desire to join the ANC to fight against oppression. The membership rocketed from 4000 to 100,000 within months.” (The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa, 1992)*

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was the Volunteer in Chief, together with Nana Sita of the combined South African Indian Congress.



[“20 Defiance campaign leaders appear in the Johannesburg Magistrates Court on a charge of contravening the Suppression of Communism Act, August 26, 1952” - Jurgen Schadeberg](#)

Including: Dr. Yusuf Dadoo; J.B. Marks; Ahmed Kathrada; ANC President Dr J. S. Moroka; Nana Sita; Maulvi Cachalia.

Umrabulo (2003) also records:

*“A significant feature of the Defiance Campaign was the meeting in November 1952 of over 200 whites called together by the National Action Committee of the ANC and SAIC, and addressed by Sisulu, Tambo and Cachalia, at which the **Congress of Democrats** was formed. Thus was forged another component of the Congress Alliance which played such a significant role in the ensuing decade.”*

Henry Nxumalo, in “Drum”, in October 1952 wrote:

*“The first groups of Defiers came up before the magistrate and were sentenced to periods from four to six weeks, with option of a fine. The fine was refused, and the Defiers served their full sentences. This was the pattern of all the defiance groups which followed. There was no violence, no resistance to arrest. The groups marched off and were taken to the gaol without incident.”*

The Defiers suffered greatly. Eventually, the campaign was called off, and new tactics were developed.

In a “Call to ANC Ranks” in 1954, the new President of the ANC, Chief Luthuli wrote of the Freedom Volunteers who had been sent out to gather the people’s wishes for the coming Congress of the People and Freedom Charter:

*“Some people think that these volunteers are called upon to defy the law as in the case of the Defiance Campaign. This is not the case.”*

The document went on:

*“Pointing out that the Defiance Campaign, having served a notable purpose, was ‘brought to a halt after due consultation with our allies, the S.A. Indian Congress,’ Mr. Lutuli says the first task of the freedom volunteers of today is to work for the Congress of the People ‘which will culminate in a great assembly, whereat our multiracial nation, through delegates elected democratically by people in all corners of the Union, will write our Freedom Charter – a South African Declaration of Human Rights.’”*

The scene was set for the third great initial occasion that took place on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1955.

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## O R Tambo in 1968: "Courage rising with danger"

*"Chief Luthuli has told us over the course of his leadership over us, that what we need is courage that rises with danger. The Nationalist Party of South Africa, which came into power twenty years ago, came with a violence and viciousness that was new in many respects. We confronted them with a nonviolent approach to the struggle. They killed freely, and Chief Luthuli led us, the African National Congress led the people, and now this nonviolent approach became a militant form of struggle and we launched more campaigns. The more killings there were, the more pressure there was. This was courage rising with danger. When the killing took place in 1950 on a fairly massive scale, we decided to demonstrate against this, to intensify the struggle against apartheid pressure. a national stay-at-home on June 26, 1950. This was June 26th.*

*"Since then, June 26th has been the centre, the peg on which we have hung many a campaign against racism in South Africa. It has come to symbolise the determination of our people to fight harder, the more severe and brutal the oppression." (Speech to United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid, Stockholm, Sweden, 18 June 1968).*



Oliver Reginald Tambo



**Volunteer and Contributions to the Freedom Charter, Kliptown, 1955**

# **June 26<sup>th</sup> 1955:**

## **The Adoption of the Freedom Charter**

*at the Congress of the People, Kliptown*

The planning of the Congress of the People began in 1953, and the campaign was only wound down in 1956, the year of the beginning of the Treason Trial, which was a consequence of the same Congress of the People. The Treason Trial went on for another four years. Hence it is possible to say that events connected with the date of June 26<sup>th</sup> dominated the entire decade of the 1950s in South Africa.

The Congress of the People had a National Action Council, and Committees in all five provinces, and 50,000 volunteers whose job was to collect the people's demands for inclusion in the Freedom Charter, from all over the country.

The Freedom Charter begins with these words, in a Preamble:

***We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:***

*that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people;*

And it continues in ten sections:

***The People Shall Govern!***

***All National Groups Shall have Equal Rights!***

***The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!***

***The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!***

***All Shall be Equal Before the Law!***

***All Shall Enjoy Equal Human Rights!***

***There Shall be Work and Security!***

***The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!***

***There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!***

***There Shall be Peace and Friendship!***

The Freedom Charter concludes:

***These freedoms we will fight for, side by side, throughout our lives, until we have won our liberty***



Poster to popularise the Freedom Charter

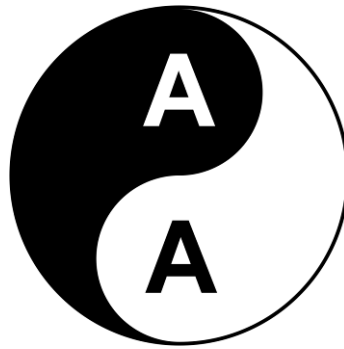
**On June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1984, O R Tambo said:**

*“In saluting you this month of June - on the eve of June 26th, the anniversary of the national day of struggle - our call to you all is: Organise, mobilise and step up the mass offensive around the immediate issues of the day and the fundamental question of People’s Power.”*



**From left to right: Yusuf Cachalia, Walter Sisulu, Ruth First and Albertina Sisulu at the Congress of the people, Kliptown, 1955, Mayibuye Archives**

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Anti-Apartheid Movement Logo

**June 26<sup>th</sup> 1959:**

## **Formation of the Anti-Apartheid Movement**

Christabel Gurney, former editor of Anti-Apartheid News, wrote in 1999:

*“On June 26th, 1959, a group of South African exiles and their British supporters met in London’s Holborn Hall to call for a boycott of fruit, cigarettes and other goods imported from South Africa.”*

Summing up the situation in South Africa, Gurney records:

*“By the end of the 1950s the government had outlawed almost all forms of public political activity and arrested or placed bans on most of the Congress leaders. So Congress turned to boycott. In 1957, the people of Alexandra township walked to work for over three months and forced the local bus company to rescind a penny increase on fares. At its 1958 annual conference the ANC announced: ‘The economic boycott is going to be one of the major political weapons in the country.’ In the spring of 1959 it announced plans to boycott potatoes grown on farms using forced labour and launched a boycott of goods made by firms which supported the National Party. This was to begin on June 26th, the day marked every year since 1950 as South Africa Freedom Day.”*

The body that was launched on 26 June 1959 in London became the Anti-Apartheid Movement. It was a voluntary, mass democratic movement of British people in solidarity. It did not ask for government sanctions. Instead it called for citizens’ direct action in the form of boycott of South African goods and services of all kinds, beginning with Outspan oranges and Cape apples.

This campaign grew over the years until it became a major force in British politics, and it gave rise to similar movements in other countries. It used South African tactics of "*the mass offensive*" and boycott. It became a pillar of the struggle against the apartheid regime.

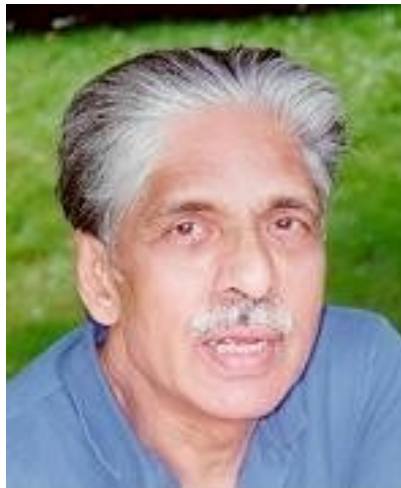
The Anti-Apartheid Movement observed June 26<sup>th</sup> as South Africa Freedom Day.



**Mike Terry, OBE, 1947 - 2008, Teacher.  
Executive Director of the Anti-Apartheid Movement from 1975 to 1994.  
Photographed in the Charlotte Street, London, office of the AAM.**



## Part 6



[Enuga Sreenivasulu Reddy](#)

Secretary of the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid 1963–1965  
Director of the United Nations Centre against Apartheid, 1976–1983

# June 26<sup>th</sup>: Aftermath and Summary

In December 1952, the United Nations General Assembly set up a United Nations Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa (UNCORS). Later, this became the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid; later still the United Nations Centre against Apartheid was established, with Mr Enuga S Reddy as its Director.

The text of the Freedom Charter was reproduced in the third report of UNCORS to the General Assembly in 1955. It was published as a document of the Security Council, at the request of the delegation of Benin in October 1977 as document S/12425.

The United Nations publicised the Freedom Charter all over the world.

On June 26, 1969, as recorded by E S Reddy, the following statement was made to the Committee by one of its members, H. E. Mr. Abdulrahim Abby Farah (Somalia):

*“Today, **26 June**, is traditionally observed by the African National Congress of South Africa and its associate organisations, as well as by many other bodies,*

*including anti-apartheid movements and various international organisations, as 'South Africa Freedom Day.' 26 June was so designated because it was on 26 June 1950 that the first national stay-at-home strike was organised as a mark of protest against the Suppression of Communism Act and other undemocratic and unjust legislation.*

*"It was, again, on 26 June 1952, that the historic Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws was launched. But above all, 26 June was chosen as 'South Africa Freedom Day' as it commemorates the historic adoption, on 26 June 1955, of the Freedom Charter by the Congress of the People of South Africa, a multi-racial conference of the opponents of apartheid and racial discrimination."*



**United Nations**